



# Our Language Problem

*By*

MAHATMA GANDHI



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*By*

ANAND T. HINGORANI  
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## PREFACE

Of recent times, very few things have aroused so much bitter controversy in the land as the problem of our national language. The communal tension has, unfortunately, prevented both Hindus and Muslims from taking a detached and dispassionate view of the matter, as it has always done so in respect of even the larger questions affecting the well-being and dignity of our Motherland. Gandhiji's views, as set forth in these pages, will, therefore, come as a refreshing relief to all those who have grown sick of communalism, and would like to study and understand the language problem in its proper perspective.

The reader will do well to treat this *brochure* as complementary to the "Gandhi Series" Vol IV *wz*, "To the Hindus and Muslims," because, then, alone he will know the Hindu-Muslim problem in all its aspects.

ANAND T HINGORANI

*Upper Sind Colony, Karachi (Sind)*

*August 1, 1942*



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## AN ALL-INDIA SCRIPT

"Though I know that it is out of fashion just now to suggest anything along constructive lines that may bring Hindus and Mussalmans together, I cannot help repeating that Hindus must learn Urdu if they will come nearer their Mussalman brethren, and Mussalmans must learn Hindi if they will come nearer their Hindu brethren."

A Gujarati correspondent wrote some time ago to *Navajivan* a letter advising that I should print *Navajivan* in Devanagari script, so as to give a practical demonstration of my belief in the necessity of there being one script for all India. Although it is my firm conviction that there should be one script for all the Indian languages, and that that script can only be Devanagari, I could not follow the correspondent's advice for the reasons stated in my note in *Navajivan*, and which I need not reiterate here. But there is no doubt that we ought to seize the opportunity that the great national awakening gives us, of not merely popularizing the idea but of doing something concrete in that direction. The Hindu-Muslim madness no doubt stands in the way of a thorough reform. But before the acceptance of Devanagari script becomes a universal fact in India, Hindu India has got to be converted to the idea of one script for all the languages derived from Sanskrit and the Dravidian stock. At the present moment, we have Bengali script in Bengal, Gurmukhi in the Punjab, Sindhi in Sindh, Oriya in Utkal, Gujarati in Gujarat, Telugu in Andhradesha, Tamil in Tamilnad, Malayali in Kerala, Kanaiese in Karanatak, not to speak of Kaithi in Behar and Modi in the Deccan. If all these scripts could be replaced by Devanagari, for all practical and national purposes, it would mean a tremendous step forward. It will help to solidify Hindu India and



bring the different provinces in closer touch. Anyone who has any knowledge of the different Indian languages and scripts, knows to his cost what time it takes to master a new script. For the love of his country, no doubt, nothing is difficult, and time spent in mastering the different scripts, some of which are very beautiful, is in no way idly spent. But this spirit of abandon is not to be expected of millions. National leaders have to make things easy for them. Therefore, we must have an easily adaptable universal script for all India, and there is nothing so adaptable and ready-made as Devanagari script. There is, or there used to be, an all-India organization for this very purpose. I do not know what its activities are at present. But if the work has to be done, either the original association should be strengthened, or a new one formed for this purpose. The movement should in no way be confused with the spread of Hindi or Hindustani as the *lingua franca*. The latter work is going on very slowly, but steadily. Use of one script will facilitate the spread of one language. But the functions of the two run parallel only up to a point. Hindi or Hindustani is not designed to replace the provincial languages, but is intended to supplement them, and to be used for inter-provincial contact. And till the Hindu-Muslim tension lasts, it takes the form either of Urdu written in the Persian script, and containing a preponderance of Persian or Arabic words, or Hindi written in Devanagari, and containing a preponderance of Sanskrit words. When the hearts of the two meet, the two forms of the same language will be fused together, and we shall have a resultant of the two, containing as many Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic or other words as may be necessary for its full growth and full expression.

But one script is undoubtedly designed to displace all the different scripts, so as to render it easy for people belonging to different provinces to learn provincial languages. The best way of achieving the purpose is first to make the learning of Devanagari script compulsory,

at least for Hindus, in all the schools, as it is in Gujarat, and, secondly, to print the important literature in different Indian languages in Devanagari script. Such effort has already been made to a certain extent. I have seen *Gitanjali* printed in Devanagari script. But the effort requires to be made on a large scale, and there should be propaganda carried on for the spread of such books. Though I know that it is out of fashion just now to suggest anything along constructive lines that may bring Hindus and Mussalmans together, I cannot help repeating what I have said in these columns and elsewhere, that Hindus must learn Urdu if they will come nearer their Mussalman brethren, and Mussalmans must learn Hindi if they will come nearer their Hindu brethren. Those, who have faith in real unity between Hindus and Mussalmans, need not be disconcerted by the present terrible expression of mutual hatred. Their faith, if it is of any value, must make them actively but unobtrusively perform, whenever possible, all acts of mutual toleration, affection and courtesy; and learning of one another's language is the least that one can do in that direction. Is it not better for Hindus to learn through the many ably-written Urdu books by devout Mussalmans what Mussalmans think of the Quran and the Prophet, and for Mussalmans to learn through equally well-written Hindi books by devout Hindus what Hindus think of the Gita and Krishna, than that the respective parties should learn all the bad things that might have been said about their respective religious books and their inspirers through their ignorant or fanatical detractors?

## TWO GOOD RESOLUTIONS

"We ought not unnecessarily to tax the future generations with the trouble of having to learn different scripts..... To-day the impenetrable barrier of different scripts has made the learning of sister languages and the learning of Hindi by the sister provinces a needlessly heavy task"

The Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, recently held at Indore, passed some useful resolutions. Among them was one giving a definition of Hindi, and another expressing the opinion that all the languages that had descended from, or had been largely influenced by, Sanskrit should be written in the Devanagari script.

The first resolution is designed to emphasize the fact that Hindi does not supplant the provincial languages, that it supplements them, and that it extends the knowledge and usefulness of the speaker as an all-India worker. By recognizing the fact that the language written in the Urdu script, but understood both by Mussalmans and Hindus, is also Hindi, the Sammelan disarms the suspicion that it has any designs upon the Urdu script. The authorized script of the Sammelan still remains Devanagari. The propagation of the Devanagari script among the Hindus of the Punjab, as elsewhere, will still continue. The resolution in no way detracts from the value of the Devanagari script. It recognizes the right of Mussalmans to write the language in the Urdu script, as they have done hitherto.

In order to give practical effect to the second resolution, a committee was appointed, with Kakasaheb Kalelkar as Chairman and Convener, to explore the possibility of such introduction and to make such changes and additions in the Devanagari script, as may be necessary to make it easier to write and more perfect than it is, so as to represent the sounds not expressed by the existing letters.

Such a change is necessary if inter-provincial contacts are to increase, and if Hindi is to be the medium of communication between provinces. The second was ever an accepted proposition for the past twenty-five years with those who subscribe to the creed of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. The question of script has often been discussed, but never seriously tackled. And yet it seems to be a natural corollary to the first proposition. Learning sister languages becomes incredibly simple and easy. *Gitanjali*, written in the Bengali script, is a sealed book to every one except the Bengalis. It is almost an open book when it is written in the Devanagari script. There is in it a vast number of words derived from Sanskrit and easily understood by the people of the other provinces. Everyone can test the truth of this statement. We ought not unnecessarily to tax the future generations with the trouble of having to learn different scripts. It is cruel to require a person desiring to learn Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kanarese, Ooriya and Bengali to learn six scripts, besides Devanagari, let alone the Urdu script, if he would know what the Muslim brethren are saying and doing through their writings. I have not presented an ambitious programme for a lover of his country or humanity. To-day, the impenetrable barrier of different scripts has made the learning of sister languages and the learning of Hindi by the sister provinces a needlessly heavy task. It will be for Kakasaheb's committee on the one hand to educate and canvass public opinion in favour of the reform, and on the other to demonstrate, by practical application, its great utility in saving the time and energy of those who would learn Hindi or the provincial languages. Let no one run away with the idea that the reform, will diminish the importance of the provincial languages. Indeed, it can only enrich them even as the adoption of a common script has enriched the languages of Europe by making intercourse between its provinces easy.

## HINDI OR HINDUSTANI—I

"The Indian culture of our times is in the making. Many of us are striving to produce a blend of all the cultures which seem to-day to be in clash with one another. No culture can live, if it attempts to be exclusive."

Elsewhere, the reader will find a deeply interesting letter from an esteemed friend which was read to the delegates who recently assembled in Nagpur and who inaugurated the Akhil Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad. There is a similar letter from another Muslim friend enclosing a leading article on the subject in *The Bombay Chronicle*, dated 27th April last. These letters and *The Chronicle* article generally represent my views on the question of common inter-provincial speech. However, I fear that there are, perhaps, limitations to my agreement which need to be publicly stated. The limitations, if they may be so called, are designed to compass the very end that my friends have in view.

At the outset, I must dismiss from consideration the suspicion entertained by some Muslims. The whole atmosphere is surcharged with suspicion. No person's declarations or acts are above suspicion. The best way, in my opinion, for those who sincerely desire full communal unity, and have themselves given no cause for suspicion, is to act on the square without being swayed one way or the other by the passions of the moment, especially in matters like the Parishad which have nothing to do with the passions. The object of the Parishad is to gather together all that is best in all the languages of India, and to make it available to the largest number of her inhabitants and, therefore, through a speech understood by the largest number. Urdu is undoubtedly one of the

many languages and contains treasures which should be the common property of all India. No Indian who wishes to know the Muslim mind or to know all about Islam, as it is being interpreted through the Indian medium, can afford to ignore Urdu literature. And the Parishad, just established, will fail in its duty and purpose, if it does not unlock for all India the treasures to be found in the current Urdu literature.

My correspondent has made a mistake which needs to be cleared. He could not have had before him the full text of Tandonji's<sup>1</sup> speech made, not as the friend thinks at Benares, but at Allahabad, or he would not have made the serious mistake of thinking that when Tandonji talked of 22 crores speaking Hindi, he had in mind only those who wrote the modern artificial Hindi. He made it clear that he referred to the vast mass of people of north of the Vindhya, including the seven crores of Mussalmans, who, more or less, spoke and understood the language which is evolved from Vraja Bhasha, and which has the latter's grammatical structure. The name Hindi given to it is not original. It was given by Muslim writers to what they wrote for the people of the North, and what was undoubtedly like that which their Hindu brethren wrote. Later on, a bifurcation took place and Hindi written in Devanagari came to be the speech of the Hindus of the North, and Urdu written in Arabic or Persian script came to be the speech of the Muslims of the North. It is hardly true as yet to say that Urdu is common to the Mussalmans all over India. I know that the Ali Brothers and I found it difficult to make ourselves understood by the Moplahs of Malabar through our Urdu. We had to have a Malayalee interpreter. We found a similar difficulty in East Bengal among its numerous Mussalmans. Both Tandonji and Rajendra Babu, therefore, meant the same thing absolutely as my friends when they used the word 'Hindi.' The

<sup>1</sup> Babu Purshottamdas Tandon.

use of the word 'Hindustani' would not make their position clearer.

But the writer of the letter is on sure ground when he complains of the writers of the North who write a language which they call 'Hindi', but which very few persons even of the North would understand. It is an effort which is doomed to fail like Johnsonian speech.

Then, why insist on 'Hindi or Hindustani', and why not simply say 'Hindustani,' the writer may say. For one simple reason that it would be impertinent for me, a new-comer, to ask an association of 25 years' standing to alter its name, when the need for it is not clearly proved. The new Parishad is an off-spring of the older Association and wants to cater both for the Muslims and Hindus of the North who speak the common mother-tongue, it does not matter whether it is called Hindi or Hindustani. For me, either word has the same connotation. But I would not quarrel with those who would use the word 'Hindi,' if they mean the same speech as I do.

I do not understand the writer's objection to the adoption of the expression Akhil Bharatiya. It is an expression certainly known to the Hindus all over India. And I make bold to say that even the majority of the Mussalmans of the North would understand it. The Indian culture of our times is in the making. Many of us are striving to produce a blend of all the cultures which seem to-day to be in clash with one another. No culture can live, if it attempts to be exclusive. There is no such thing as pure Aryan culture in existence to-day in India. Whether the Aryans were indigenous to India or were unwelcome intruders, does not interest me much. What does interest me is the fact that my remote ancestors blended with one another with the utmost freedom, and we, of the present generation, are a result of that blend. Whether we are doing any good to the country of our birth and the tiny globe which sustains us, or whether we are a burden, the future alone will show. So far as I am concerned, the new Parishad and the Hindi Sahitya Sam-

melan have the common good of all through a blending of the best in all India's languages. If they have not, they will perish. But blending to be that must not mean exclusion of everything that has an Aryan flavour, any more than that of everything that has an Arabian or for that matter English or any other flavour.

I may not prolong the argument this week. There are still some important points to be covered. I hope to deal with them next week.

\* \* \* \*

*This is the letter which Gandhiji has referred to in the article above.*

#### FOR 'HINDUSTANI ONLY'

"I wish it had been possible for me to come to Nagpur instead of sending this letter. My desire to attend the Sahitya Parishad meetings was all the keener because there is much with which I disagree in the policy of the Parishad, and much that causes me pain, and there is no one in the country except you who is generous enough to attribute honest motives even to those who differ radically from you. What I am submitting to you here would seem irrelevant, if not impertinent, to anyone who had decided things for himself, but you practise a hospitality which does not distinguish between followers and dissenters, and it is the assurance of a friendly reception that gives me the courage to knock at your door. If it were a political issue that had to be settled, I would have known my place, but the present issue is mainly cultural and literary, and it is because of disagreement that I feel it all the more a moral duty to approach you. However others may feel, I think the worst that can befall a sincere servant of the people to-day is to be cut adrift from the causes you cherish, and the policy you pursue. I cannot have peace till I have poured out my heart and moved you to sympathy, if not agreement.

"I shall begin at the beginning. For many years past, the Congress has been advocating a common speech as the necessary counterpart of a common political aspiration. From the literary point of view, this has involved public speakers in many sins of omission and commission, but I know that in Urdu literary circles, it has created a standard of simplicity and homeliness that was unknown before. Even a writer like Maulana Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, who has spent all his life reading Arabic books and treating subjects possessing a terminology that could not be amended



without disrespect, took to simplifying and 'Indianizing' his language with grim earnestness, because the ideal of a common Indian language was so dear to him.

"This common language was called 'Hindustani' in Congress circles, though the Congress did not come to any definite understanding with Urdu and Hindi speakers on the question of this name. But names, as you know, have enormous political and social significance because of their associations, and the name to be given to our common language is, therefore, very important. So far, Urdu has been the only language not confined to a province or a religious community: it has been spoken by Mussalmans all over India, and, in the North, the number of Hindus speaking it has been larger than the number of the Mussalmans. If our common language cannot be called Urdu, it must at least have a name in which the peculiar contribution of the Mussalmans—that of having evolved a language more or less common—is implied. 'Hindustani' may serve the purpose. 'Hindi' cannot. It has been studied by Mussalmans in the past, and they have done as much, if not more, than their Hindu brethren to raise it to the status of a literary language. But it has also religious and cultural associations with which Mussalmans, as a whole, cannot identify themselves. Besides, it is now evolving a vocabulary that is exclusively its own, and is generally unintelligible to those who know only Urdu.

"It would not have been relevant to emphasize this, had there not been a marked tendency to confuse Hindi and Hindustani, but never Urdu and Hindustani. Your speech at Indore, last year, conveyed the definite impression that you consider the two identical, and in your foreword to the first issue of the *Hans*, you have spoken of the two as being the same. I am quite sure what you mean by Hindi is primarily the language of the common people, the language which they speak, and which will serve as the best medium for their education. But the 'Hindi' of many who work for its propagation is no such language; and when they substitute Hindi for Hindustani they substitute a vocabulary, a taste and political and religious associations. I am appealing against this tendency to you because the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad seems to have fallen a prey to it also.

"I was among those who felt very happy when the Parishad was formed, because I believed that it would provide a solid basis for a common language. I also welcomed the publication of the *Hans*. I cannot say anything of the other activities of the Parishad, but if the issues of the *Hans* are any indication of its attitude and its policy, they have been a sad disillusionment. Munshi Prem Chand Saheb is to-day perhaps our greatest literary

figure, one of those rare personalities for whom literature is a form of both self-expression and service. He is a master alike of Urdu and Hindi, and he combines in himself the best literary as well as social traditions of Hindu-Muslim culture. The *Hans* should have used the language he writes, and stood for the tradition he represents. It has not done so, and that is my grievance. The impression that the *Hans* gives is of a markedly sectional magazine, using a more Sanskritized Hindi than other Hindi journals, a language that cannot be called Hindustani any more than it can be called English. There is nothing in its outlook or the selection of articles to suggest that the Indian nation is a community of communities, or that there is any culture in India but one. This is not federation, but imperialism.

"A much smaller matter than this will illustrate my meaning. The Sahitya Parishad has been called 'Bharatiya' and not 'Hindustani.' Why is this so? If 'Bharat' means anything at all, it means the India of the Aryans, in which not only the Mussalmans and their contribution to Indian life, but centuries of development and change have no place. Does not this suggest exclusiveness as well as retrogression? Again, in the Hindi circulars sent to us, there are not more than two or three words of the spoken language, pure Sanskrit forms like निम्नलिखित being used for the ordinary Hindi नीचे लिखे हुए, so that it is quite unintelligible to me, though I know the Nagari script fairly well.

"It is quite clear that Sanskrit and Arabic are both rich in technical terms, but a common Indian language cannot rely exclusively on either of them, for if Arabic is a foreign language, Sanskrit has never been generally spoken, and anyone who cares to study the spoken Hindi will find that all the Sanskrit words it contains have, in course of time, undergone considerable transformation, because they cannot be pronounced with ease—not by the Mussalmans, but (nor?) by the Indian masses. Even short words like ग्राम and वर्ष have become गाव and वरस. These facts are all ignored by many advocates of Hindi, for they have substituted the original Sanskrit forms of these and many other words, whether this is due to pedantry or ignorance or prejudice—because the spoken forms of Sanskrit words have all been adopted by Urdu—it is not for me to say. But it is quite obvious that these friends are not directly concerned with the propagation of the living, spoken language, but rather with the Aryanization of Indian life. It is no concern of the Mussalmans if our Hindu brethren work for reform or reaction among themselves, but common honesty demands that such movements be kept strictly apart from the linguistic problem.

"In his reply to a letter from Aquil Sahab, Sjt. K. M. Munshi says that the Gujaratis, Maharashtris, Bengalis, and Keralites 'have built up literary traditions in which pure Urdu elements are almost non-existent. If we take to Hindi, in the very nature of things we will take to Sanskritic Hindi.' In the first place, I know for certain that Gujarati, Marathi and Bengali all contain a considerable number of Persian words, and I am not prepared to admit that the Hindus of Gujarat and Bengal must Sanskritize their speech to come close to each other and to the Mussalmans. Besides, it is not 'pure Urdu elements' with which we are concerned, but the living language and idioms of Northern India. If this living language is taken as the basis for a common language, the Mussalmans can co-operate effectively. A revision to Sanskrit means that they and all their past services to Hindi, Bengali and Gujarati are to be passed over. To ask for co-operation from us under such conditions is nothing less than asking us to be accomplices in our own suicide.

"That the Hindi-Urdu question is in imminent danger of becoming a communal issue is evident from the speech Mr. Purshottamdas Tandon, delivered at the opening ceremony of the Hindi Museum at Benares, in the first week of this month. He declared that next to Chinese, Hindi was the most widely spoken language in Asia. This means, in other words, that the problem of a common language is solved, it is going to be Hindi, because Hindi is spoken by the majority of Indians. Those who clamour for Hindustani can be outnumbered, therefore they cannot matter. But the counting of heads is no more a remedy than breaking of heads. Whatever Mr. Tandon may have really meant, it seems to me that ground is being prepared for another such indignity as the Communal Award.

"It is only your prestige and the confidence inspired by your personality that can rescue us. I am giving below a number of points which, in my humble opinion, are rational in themselves and provide a sound basis for a common language. If you consider them and find them worthy, not in your own estimation only but also of the cause they are meant to serve, you may make them known to others. What I am dreaming of just now is that they might become the basis of a public pronouncement by you.

"The points are:

1. That our common language shall be called 'Hindustani', not 'Hindi.'
2. That Hindustani shall not be considered to have any peculiar association with the religious traditions of any community.
3. That the test of 'foreign' and 'indigenous' shall not be applied to any word, but only the test of currency.

4. That all words used by Hindu writers of Urdu and Muslim writers of Hindi shall be deemed current. This, of course, shall not apply to Urdu and Hindi as sectional languages

5. That in the choice of technical terms, specially political terminology, no preference be given to Sanskrit terms as such, but as much room as possible be allowed for natural selection from among Urdu, Hindi and Sanskrit terms

6. That the Devanagari and the Arabic scripts shall both be considered current and official, and that in all institutions whose policy is directed by the official promoters of Hindustani, facilities shall be provided for learning both scripts

"There may be friends to whom these suggestions will look like Muslim demands. They are not. But I know that unless an assurance of some such kind is given by you and the Parishad, there can be no question of Muslim literary effort being harnessed in the cause of a common language. So I have submitted these suggestions to you. If they are extravagant, I know you will pardon me, and if they are unjustified, they will not offend you. So far as I am concerned, I have only wanted to do my duty, and to show, by an appeal to you, my unlimited respect for your judgment and my confidence in your deep feeling of justice and tolerance."—M

## HINDI OR HINDUSTANI—II

“Hindi, Hindustani and Urdu are different names for the same speech, just as the dialects of Cornwall, Lancashire and Middlesex are different names for the same speech. What is being aimed at to-day is not to evolve a new language, but to adopt the language known under the three names as the inter-provincial language.”

In the previous article I have already showed how and why I regard Hindi and Hindustani as synonymous terms, and why it is necessary to retain the use of the word “Hindi.”

An objection to the use of the word “Hindi” has been thus stated in the letter reproduced in the last issue :

“It has been studied by Mussalmans in the past and they have done as much, if not more, than their Hindu brethren to raise it to the status of a literary language. But it has also religious and cultural associations with which Mussalmans, as a whole, cannot identify themselves. Besides, it is now evolving a vocabulary that is exclusively its own, and is generally unintelligible to those who know only Urdu.”

If the Mussalmans of old studied and enriched Hindi in the past, why should they of the present generation avoid it? Surely, the Hindi of old had greater religious and cultural associations than modern Hindi has to-day. And should one avoid the use of a language because of its religious and cultural associations? Must I avoid Arabic and Persian for their religious and cultural associations? I may not be affected by the latter, if I do not want to be or if I have antipathy towards them. Surely, if we are to live together as blood-brothers that we are, we may not fight shy of each other's culture. And why quarrel with the use of Sanskrit words in Hindi to the point of rebelling against the language itself? The un-

natural process of using Sanskrit words in the place of simpler current words, or giving the derived words their original Sanskrit form, is undoubtedly a reprehensible practice and robs a language of its music. But a certain use of Sanskrit words, as the nation expands, is inevitable in the hands of Hindus who know only Sanskrit, as the use of Arabic is inevitable in the hands of Mussalmans who know only Arabic, though both write the same language and have no special likes or dislikes. Educated Hindus and Mussalmans will have to acquaint themselves with both the forms. Is this not true of all growing languages? Educated Englishmen know both 'sympathy' and 'fellow-feeling' or 'fatherly' and 'paternal' or 'yearly' and 'annual.' The difficulty with us is that just now our hearts are not one, and the best of us are affected by the virus of mutual suspicion.

Hindi, Hindustani and Urdu are different names for the same speech, just as the dialects of Cornwall, Lancashire and Middlesex are different names for the same speech. What is being aimed at to-day is not to evolve a new language, but to adopt the language known under the three names as the inter-provincial language. I believe Shri Munshi was right when he defended the form of the language used in *Hans*. For rendering, say, a Tamil or Telugu piece into Hindi or Hindustani, the use of Sanskrit words is almost inevitable, even as the use of Arabic words would be inevitable if one was translating an Arabic piece into Hindi or Hindustani. Rabindranath's *Gitanjali* in Hindi would read much less musical than it does, if its Hindi or Hindustani translation studiously avoided the Sanskrit words with which Bengali is replete. Literary Mussalmans like Maulvi Abdul Haq Saheb or Aquil Saheb have but to make their own contribution to the common speech to avoid its degenerating into a language only spoken by the Hindus. I would if I could wean them from treating the Urdu form as the exclusive speech of Mussalmans, as I would wean literary Hindus from treating Hindi as the exclusive

speech of Hindus. If none of them is weaned, there will be no common speech for Hindus and Mussalmans of the North, no matter by what name it is known. Here at least, therefore, we do not need to quarrel about the name. Call it by what name you like, if only you mean the same thing in all sincerity.

There remains the question of script. At the present moment, insistence on Devanagari by Mussalmans is not to be thought of. Insistence on the adoption of Arabic script by the vast mass of Hindus is still less thinkable. What, therefore, I have suggested as the definition of Hindi or Hindustani is 'that language which is generally spoken by Hindus and Mussalmans of the North, whether written in Devanagari or Urdu.' I abide by that definition, in spite of protests to the contrary. But there is undoubtedly a Devanagari movement, with which I have allied myself whole-heartedly, and that is to have it as the common script for all the languages spoken in the different provinces, especially those which have a large Sanskrit vocabulary. Anyway, an attempt is being made to transcribe in Devanagari script the most precious treasures of all the languages of India.

## A FEW OBVIOUS CONSIDERATIONS

"If your horizon goes as far as Sinagar in the North and Cape Comorin in the South, Karachi in the West and Dibrugarh in the East,—as, indeed, it should—there is for you nothing for it but to learn Hindi."

*In the course of his Karnatak Hindi Convocation address at Bangalore, Gandhiji said*

I shall take this occasion to give you a few obvious reasons why Hindi or Hindustani alone can be the national language. So long as you live in Karnatak and do not look out of it, a knowledge of Kannada is enough for you. But a look at any one of your villages is enough to show that your outlook and your horizon have widened, you no longer think in the terms of Karnatak but in the terms of India. Events outside Karnatak interest you, but the interest cannot obviously go very far without a common medium of expression. How is a Karnatak man to establish and maintain contact with men from Sind or U. P. ? Some of our people have held, and perhaps still hold, that English can be this medium. If it was a question of a few thousands of our educated people, English would certainly do. But I am sure none of you will be satisfied with that. You and I want millions of people to establish inter-provincial contacts, and they cannot obviously do so through English for generations to come, if ever. There is no reason why they should all learn English, and it certainly is no sure or substantial means of winning a livelihood. Its value for this object will, if anything, become less and less as more people come to learn it. Then, Hindi-Hindustani offers no difficulty in studying as English must. Study of it is never going to take the time that study of English would do. It has been esti-



mated that the number of Hindus and Mussalmans speaking and understanding Hindi-Hindustani exceeds 200 millions. Would not the 11 million of men and women of Karnatak like to learn a language that is spoken by 200 millions of their own brothers and sisters? And can they not very easily learn it? The answer is supplied by a fact I noticed very strikingly a moment ago. You have all listened to a Kannada translation of Lady Raman's Hindi speech. You could not but have noticed that the translation adopted unaltered quite a large number of words which Lady Raman had used in her Hindi speech—words like *prem*, *premi*, *sangha*, *sabha*, *adhyaksha*, *pada*, *ananta*, *bhakti*, *swagata*, *adhyakshata*, *sammelan*. All these words are common to Hindi and Kannada. Now, supposing some one was translating Lady Raman's speech into English, could he have retained any of these words? By no means. The English equivalent of every one of these words would be new to the listeners. When, therefore, our Kannada friends say that Hindi is difficult for them, they amuse me no less than they make me angry and impatient. I am sure it is a matter of a few hour's careful study for a month. I am 67 and have not many years before me, but I assure you that when I listened to the Kannada translation, I felt as though I should not take more than eight days to learn Kannada, if I gave a few hours to it each day. With the exception of half a dozen like the Rt. Hon Srinivasa Sastri and myself, all of you here are quite young. Have you not energy enough to devote to a study of Hindi four hours each day for just one month? Do you think it is too much to devote this time to cultivate a contact with 200 million of your own countrymen? Now, suppose those of you who do not know English decided to learn English. Do you think any one of you would be able to learn the language in a month by devoting four hours to it each day? By no means. The reason why Hindi is so ridiculously easy is that all the languages, including even the four South Indian, spoken by Hindus in India contain a

large number of Sanskrit words. It is a matter of history that contact in the old days between the South and the North used to be maintained by means of Sanskrit. Even to-day, the *Sastris* in the South hold discourses with the *Sasthis* in the North through Sanskrit. The difference in the various vernaculars is mainly of grammar. In the North Indian languages even the grammatical structure is identical. The grammar of the South Indian languages is, of course, vastly different, and even their vocabularies, before they came under the influence of Sanskrit, were equally different. But now even these languages have adopted a very large number of Sanskrit words, so much so that I have not found it difficult, whenever I have gone South, to get a gist of what was being said in all the four languages.

I come now to our Mussalman friends. They know the vernaculars of their provinces as a matter of course, and Urdu in addition. There is no difference whatsoever between Hindi and Urdu or Hindustani. The grammar is common to both, it is only the script that makes the difference, and when one comes to think of it one finds that the three words Hindi, Hindustani and Urdu denote only one language. If we were to refer to the lexicons of these languages, we should find that most of the words are the same. For them, therefore, barring the question of script, which will adjust itself, there is no difficulty whatsoever.

To return, therefore, to where I began, if your horizon goes as far as Srinagar in the North and Cape Comorin in the South, Karachi in the West and Dibrughat in the East,—as, indeed, it should—there is for you nothing for it but to learn Hindi. English, I have shown to you, cannot be our *lingua franca*. I have no prejudice against English. A knowledge of English is necessary for a few scholars, it is necessary for international contacts, and for a knowledge of the sciences pursued in the West. But I am pained when an attempt is made to give English a place it cannot take. That attempt, I have no doubt, is

bound to fail. Everything looks proper in its own place.

There is a scare of which I should like to disabuse your minds. Is Hindi to be taught at the expense of Kannada? Is it likely to oust Kannada? On the contrary, I claim that the more we propagate Hindi the more shall we stimulate a study of our vernaculars, and even improve their power and potency. I say this from my experience of different provinces.

A word about the question of script. Even when I was in South Africa, I thought that all the languages derived from Sanskrit should have Devanagari script, and I am sure that even the Dravidian languages could be easily learnt through the Devanagari script. I have tried to learn Tamil and Telugu through the Tamil and Telugu scripts, as also Kannada and Malayalam, for a few days, through their respective scripts. I tell you I was frightfully upset over having to learn four scripts, when I could see that if the four languages had a common script—Devanagari—I should learn them in no time. What a terrible strain it is on those like me who are anxious to learn the four languages? As between the speakers of the four South Indian vernaculars, does it need any argument to show that Devanagari would be the most convenient script for the speaker of one to learn the other three? The question of Hindi as *lingua franca* need not be mixed up with the question of script, but I have referred to this simply in order to point out the difficulty of those who want to know all the Indian languages.

## A COBWEB OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS

“A speech that is beyond the comprehension of the masses has but a brief existence”

I have before me a number of cuttings from various Urdu papers severely, and even bitterly, criticizing the proceedings of the recently formed Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad and *thereafter* Babu Rajendra Prasad, Babu Purshottamdas Tandon, Pandit Jawaharlal and me. They attribute motives and designs to which, I know, we are all strangers. The writers have not taken the trouble of even understanding what was said or done by us or at the Parishad. Thus, they think that the design at the bottom of the Association is to push Hindi at the expense of Urdu, and so to Sanskritize Hindi as to make it almost impossible for Mussalmans to understand it. They also infer from a speech of Babu Purshottamdas Tandon, delivered at Allahabad at the time of the opening of the Literary Museum of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, that he distorted facts when he claimed that there were nearly 23 crores of Indians who spoke, or at least understood, Hindi. There are in these writings other innuendoes which I need not notice, my purpose being simply to remove, if possible, the misunderstandings that have led to the innuendoes.

To take the last first, if the writers had the whole speech of Tandonji before them they would have known that in the 23 crores, he deliberately included the Urdu-speaking Hindus and Mussalmans. He, therefore, included Urdu in the use of the word Hindi. This will be clear if it is borne in mind that Hindi, according to the resolution adopted at Indore in 1935, to which Tandonji was party, meant that language which was spoken

in the North by Hindus and Mussalmans and was written either in Devanagari or Urdu scripts. If the writers had known this definition, surely they would have had no complaint on any account unless they objected to the very name Hindi. If they did, it was deplorable. Hindi is the original word for the language of the North. Urdu, as is well known, was the name especially given for a special purpose. The script was also a graft for the convenience of the Muslim rulers. If that is the historical sequence, there ought not to be any opposition to the use of the word 'Hindi', so long as it is used inclusively. In any event, at the most, the difference, if there must be any, narrows itself down to the use of one word or the other for signifying the same thing.

The complaint about Sanskritizing has some justification in that some writers of Hindi insist on unnecessarily introducing Sanskrit words in their writings. A similar charge can be justly brought against some Urdu writers, who insist on equally unnecessarily introducing Persian or Arabic words. And what is worse, they even alter the grammar of the language. These extremes are bound to disappear in course of time because they would never be adopted by the masses. A speech that is beyond the comprehension of the masses has but a brief existence.

As for the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad, it aims at making through Hindi, as above defined, available to the whole of India the best thought in the provinces. Surely, there is in this nothing sinister or communal, as suggested in some writings.

The adoption of 'Hindi-Hindustani' was at my instance. It was adopted in order to bring out in a compound word the meaning of the definition of Hindi. Moulvi Abdul Kadar Sahab had suggested the use either only of Hindustani or Hindi-Urdu instead of Hindi-Hindustani. I should personally have no objection to either course, but the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad could not ignore its own origin. The idea was born at the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan at Indore and took a definite

shape at Nagpur under its aegis. The retention of the word 'Hindi' was, therefore, necessary in the nature of things. The substitution of Urdu would have been bad for the reasons I have already stated. But as I have endeavoured to show Hindi, Hindustani and Urdu are synonymous terms and refer substantially to the same language

## MORE COBWEBS

“Different scripts are an unnecessary hindrance to the learning by the people of one province the language of other provinces. Even Europe, which is not one nation, has generally adopted one script. Why should India, which claims to be and is one nation, not have one script?”

A seeker of truth cannot afford to write or speak to please anybody. During my long search after truth in all things which have come my way, I know that I have hardly ever succeeded in convincing all of the correctness of my position regarding the matters then in question. In the matter of Hindi propaganda, if I have displeased certain Muslim friends, I have no less displeased Hindu friends. But unless my critics convince me of my error, they should not expect me to change merely because they want me to. Thus, a correspondent actually says that although my position is logically and historically correct, I should change it to suit the Muslim critics who would have me either to advocate the adoption of the expression ‘Hindi-Urdu’, or merely ‘Urdu’, to denote the same common speech, the objection being not to the speech but the name which it has hitherto carried. Now there is a letter before me which quarrels with my address to the Hindi Prachar Convocation, recently held at Bangalore, from another stand-point. It is a long letter from which I quote below the most relevant extracts :

“In your Convocation Address at Bangalore, you have asked the 11 million men and women of Karnatak to learn Hindi in order to establish contact with them. You have not even restricted the appeal to those who are already educated in the mother-tongue. Even taking for granted that all are educated in the mother-tongue, it is neither possible nor desirable—though possible, but not natural (*sic*)—that the masses should learn a lingu-

age other than their mother-tongue. Only all-India national workers, businessmen and other people, who come in daily contact with the people of North India, can and should learn Hindi. Necessity will make them learn the language even without any propaganda.

"Though you say that Hindi does not supplant but supplements the provincial languages, in effect it is not so. The bulk of the intellectuals of Tamil Nad to-day don't think nor even feel in Tamil, but in English. They have completely neglected Tamil. You can understand to what depths of cultural slavery they have fallen when you know that they are even proud of declaring in public meetings and other places that they cannot speak or write well in Tamil, but they can do both fluently in English. Now, some of them have taken to the study of Hindi more with the help of English than with the help of Tamil. The result is going to be the same. They will begin to think in Hindi instead of English. If a Gujarati tells you that he can write a beautiful essay in Hindi but not in Gujarati, you will be only sorry for him and think that our country is far from attaining *Purna Swaraj*. Many have begun to say in Tamil Nad that they know Hindi better than Tamil.

"One should not learn any language, even though it be the language of the gods, to the detriment of one's own mother-tongue. In this connection, I used to cite your own example to the Hindi fanatics. Though you declare that Hindi is the common language of India, you have not written either your *Autobiography* or *Satyagraha in South Africa* in Hindi, but in Gujarati. If you had written them in Hindi, many more people would have known what you say in your own words. But you preferred to write them in Gujarati. Though your teaching and personal example differ in this matter, I hold your action to be correct and proper. Therefore, I want people to follow not what you say, but, what you do.

"*Swaraj* should not mean the imposition of one language over those who speak different languages. Primary importance ought to be given only to the mother-tongue. Only secondary importance can be given to Hindi, the common language of India. Real inspiration and elevation can come only through the mother-tongue.

"Let me come to the question of script. In *Hariyan* dated 4th May, 1935, writing on the resolutions passed by the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan held at Indore, you show a partiality for the Urdu script which passes my understanding. In your Convocation Address at Bangalore also, you show the same partiality for the Urdu script. You want to destroy the scripts of all Indian



languages derived from or largely influenced by Sanskrit, and substitute Devanagari for them for the sake of those who want to learn the various languages. You want to preserve the two scripts, Devanagari and Urdu, for one and the same language spoken by Hindus and Muslims. Others, who also number millions and who have the misfortune of speaking different languages, should allow their scripts to be destroyed and displaced by Devanagari, learn Hindi-Hindustani and also learn Urdu script in order to understand and come into contact with 130 million Hindus and 70 million Muslims! Does this not sound ridiculous and represent the highest form of tyranny? The logical conclusion of this policy would inevitably be the abolition of all languages except Hindi with both of its scripts, for the Devanagari script would have been adopted for all the languages, all would have learnt Hindi and all the important works in the mother-tongues would have been translated in Hindi. I want you to reflect for a moment whether this consummation would be desirable in the best interests of India, our common land of birth. Before you propose to destroy the various scripts, should you not attempt to destroy one of the scripts, Devanagari and Urdu, for one and the same language? Why should Muslims and Hindus, speaking the same language, use two different scripts?"

I do not know that I asked all the 11 million men and women of Karnatak to learn Hindi-Hindustani. I should be more than satisfied if all those, who ever have to come in contact with the people from the North, would learn Hindi-Hindustani. But I would certainly not only deplore, as my correspondent would have me to, on the contrary, I would welcome all people of all the non-Hindi provinces learning Hindi. Why is it not desirable or natural for all India to know an all-India speech *in addition to* every province knowing its own language and in addition knowing all-India speech? Why should such knowledge be the privilege of the cultured few, and not of the masses? It will surely show a very high degree of culture for a whole nation of over 300 million souls to know two languages. That such an event is highly improbable is unfortunately too true.

What, however, would be most unfortunate would be for any province to neglect its own language and to

prefer another speech, as the correspondent complains is happening in Tamil Nad. My frequent travels in Tamil Nad have confirmed the opinion expressed by my correspondent. But, latterly, I have noticed a change for the better in that province. And the process of preferring the provincial speech to every other, where the choice is possible, will be hastened without an effort as the educated in every province recognize more and more the necessity of seeking and establishing contact with the masses.

The correspondent, incidentally, touches the eternal rivalry between English and Hindi-Hindustani to be the common speech. I have held and declared, ever since I have entered public life, the definite opinion that English never can or ought to be the all-India speech and that it can only be Hindi *i.e.*, Hindustani, the speech spoken by the millions of Hindus and Mussalmans of the North. The attempt to treat English as such is to establish a permanent bar between the masses and the English-educated classes and to retard the progress of the country to its destination. I have repeatedly explained that English has a definite place in our culture. In order to understand the rulers and the whole Western world, and to bring to India the best that the West has to give, a few of us must learn English which is the most widely known speech of the West. But a thousand times more Indians have to know Hindi-Hindustani, if the illiterate masses are to be one with the educated classes.

The correspondent is wholly ignorant of my opinion when he thinks that I have even been guilty of advising preference for Hindi over the provincial speech. There is no hiatus between my principle and my practice in this connection. I heartily endorse the proposition that primary importance should be given to the mother-tongue.

On the question of script, my correspondent's fear is justified; nor do I apologize for the opinion I hold. Different languages descended from or intimately con-

ned with Sanskrit ought to have one script, and that is surely Devanagari. Different scripts are an unnecessary hindrance to the learning by the people of one province the language of other provinces. Even Europe, which is not one nation, has generally adopted one script. Why should India, which claims to be and is one nation, not have one script? I know I am inconsistent when I tolerate both Devanagari and Urdu scripts for the same language. But my inconsistency is not quite foolish. There is Hindu-Muslim friction at the present moment. It is wise and necessary for the educated Hindus and Muslims to show mutual respect and toleration to the utmost extent possible. Hence, the option for Devanagari or Urdu scripts. Happily, there is no friction between provinces and provinces. Hence, the desirability of advocating a reform which means a closer knitting together of provinces in more ways than one. And let it be remembered that the vast mass of the people are wholly illiterate. It would be suicidal to impose on them different scripts for no other reason than a false sentiment and laziness to think.

## NECESSITY OF COMMON SCRIPT

"Service of the Motherland, to which all my life is being given and without which life would be insupportable for me, has taught me that we should try to lift unnecessary burdens of our people. The burden of knowing many scripts is unnecessary and easily avoidable."

*In the course of his Presidential Address at the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad, Madras, Gandhiji said:*

The Mahamahopadhyaya's<sup>1</sup> speech has whetted my appetite for a study of Tamil, which neither age nor desire would deter me from undertaking, but only the want of time makes difficult. The object of this Conference is to collect gems from all provincial literatures and to make them available through Hindi. For this purpose, I would make an appeal to you. Of course, everyone must know his own language thoroughly well, and he should also know the great literature of other Indian languages through Hindi. But it is also the object of the Conference to stimulate in our people the desire to know languages of other provinces, e.g., Gujaratis should know Tamil, Bengalis should know Gujarati and so on. And I tell you from experience that it is not at all difficult to pick up another Indian language. But to this end, a common script is quite essential. It is not difficult to achieve in Tamil Nad. For, look at this simple fact. Over 90 per cent of our people are illiterate. We have to start with a clean slate with them. Why should we not start making them literate by means of a common script? In Europe, they have tried the experiment of a common script quite

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Swaminatha Aiyer, popularly known as Vyasa of Tamil Literature.

successfully. Some people even go the length of saying that we might adopt the Roman script from Europe. After a good deal of controversy there is a consensus of opinion that the common script can be Devanagari and none else. Urdu is claimed as a rival, but I think neither Urdu nor Roman has the perfection and phonetic capacity of Devanagari. Please remember that I say nothing against your languages. Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada must be there and will be there. But why not teach the illiterate in these parts these languages through Devanagari script? In the interest of the national unity we desire to achieve, the adoption of Devanagari as a common script is so essential. Here it is a question of just shedding our provincialism and narrowness, there are no difficulties at all. Not that I do not like Tamil or Urdu scripts. I know both. But service of the Motherland, to which all my life is being given and without which life would be insupportable for me, has taught me that we should try to lift unnecessary burdens of our people. The burden of knowing many scripts is unnecessary and easily avoidable. I would appeal to men of letters of all provinces to resolve their differences on this point and be agreed on this matter of prime importance. Then and then only can the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad be a success

## AN EPOCH-MAKING RESOLUTION

“We cannot establish real mass contacts until the Congress decides to have all its deliberations in Hindi, and of its provincial organizations in the provincial languages”

*In the course of his speech at the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad, Madras, commenting on the resolution<sup>1</sup> passed by the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Gandhiji said:*

If the Congress went on as usual while we passed resolutions in support of Hindi as the common language, our work would be painfully slow. This resolution appeals to the Congress to exclude the use of English as a language of inter-provincial communications. English, it says, should not be allowed to take either the place of the provincial languages or of Hindi. If English had not ousted the languages of the people, the provincial languages would have been wonderfully rich to-day. If England had adopted French as the language of her national deliberations, we should have had no English literature to-day. French was the language there after the Norman conquest. But, then, the tide turned in favour of ‘English undefiled’ That created the great English literature

<sup>1</sup> “This Conference appeals to the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress to resolve not to use English in future in the proceedings of the Congress, the A I C C., and the Working Committee, and to use Hindi-Hindustani instead, provided that those who are not able to express themselves fully in Hindi-Hindustani may use English. If a member, who is unable to express himself in Hindi-Hindustani, desires to speak in the provincial language, he may do so, and arrangements may be made for translating such a speech into Hindi-Hindustani.

“If any person finds it necessary on any occasion to speak in English to make himself understood by any section of the audience, he may do so with the permission of the Chairman.”

we know. What Yakub Hussain Saheb said was quite right. The Mussalman contact had a great influence on our culture and civilization; so much so that there were men like the late Pandit Ajodhyanath who were perfect scholars in Persian and Arabic. If they had given to their mother-tongue all the time that they gave to the study of Arabic and Persian, the mother-tongue would have made great progress. Then, English came to occupy the unnatural position it does until this day. University professors can wax eloquent in English, but will not be able to express their thoughts in their own mother-tongue. Sir C. V. Raman's researches are all contained in his papers in English. They are a sealed book to those who do not know English. But look at the position in Russia. Even before the Revolution, they resolved to have all their text-books (including scientific) in Russian. That really prepared the way for Lenin's revolution. We cannot establish real mass contacts until the Congress decides to have all its deliberations in Hindi, and of its provincial organizations in the provincial languages.

This resolution becomes as much a business of the Bharatiya Parishad as of the Sammelan, for the Bharatiya Parishad is intended to advance the cause of the provincial languages; and if the Congress does not adopt the resolution, its object will be to that extent frustrated.

It is not that I am making a fetish of language. It is not that I would refuse to have *Swaraj* if I could have it at the cost of our language, as, indeed, I should refuse to have it at the cost of Truth and Non-violence. But I insist so much on the language because it is a powerful means of achieving national unity, and the more firmly it is established, the broader based will be our unity.

Don't be alarmed at my proposal of everyone learning Hindi plus a language of other provinces, besides his mother-tongue. Languages are easily learnt. Max Muller knew 14 languages, and I know a German girl who knew 11 languages when she came here five years ago,

and now knows two or three Indian languages. But you have created before your mind's eye a bugbear, and somehow feel that you cannot express yourselves in Hindi. It is our mental laziness that we have made no progress in spite of Hindustani being adopted in our Congress Constitution these 12 years.

Yakub Hussain Saheb asked me why I insisted so much on 'Hindi-Hindustani', and was not content with having simple 'Hindustani' as the common language. I must take you through the genesis of the whole thing. It was as early as 1918 that, as President of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, I suggested to the Hindi-speaking world to broaden their definition of Hindi to include Urdu. When I presided over the Sammelan once again in 1935, I had the word Hindi properly defined as a language that was spoken both by Hindus and Mussalmans and written in Devanagari or Urdu script. My object in doing so was to include in Hindi the high-flown Urdu of Maulana Shibli and the high-flown Hindi of Pandit Shyam Sunder Das. Then came the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad, also an off-shoot of the Sammelan. At my suggestion, the name Hindi-Hindustani was adopted in the place of Hindi. Abdul Haq Saheb stoutly opposed me there. I could not accept his suggestion. I should have done violence to myself and to the Sammelan, if I had given up the word 'Hindi' which was the word of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and which I had persuaded them to define so as to include Urdu. We must remember that the word Hindi is not of Hindu coinage, it was coined after the Muslim advent to describe the language which Hindus of the North spoke and studied. So many Mussalman writers of note have described their language as Hindi. And why now the quarrel over words, when Hindi is defined to include the variations spoken and written by Hindus and Mussalmans?

Then there is another factor to be considered. So far as South Indian languages are concerned, it is only Hindi with a large number of Sanskrit words that can appeal



to them, for they are already familiar with a certain number of Sanskrit words and the Sanskrit sound. When the two—Hindi and Hindustani or Urdu amalgamate and really become the all-India language, daily augmented by the introduction of provincial words, we shall have a vocabulary richer even than the English vocabulary. I hope you now understand why I insist on Hindi-Hindustani.

And, then, I would give a tip to such of you as dread the advent of Hindi-Hindustani as the only language of the Congress. Invest in a Hindi daily or a good book, read aloud part of it regularly even for five minutes, select passages from well-known Hindi writings and speeches and repeat them to yourselves for correct intonation, make a point of learning a few Hindi words every day, and I assure you that such regular practice will be enough to enable you to express yourselves well in Hindi-Hindustani in six months' time and without putting an undue strain on your memory.

## HINDI v. URDU

"Ultimately when our hearts have become one and we all are proud of India as our country rather than our provinces, and shall know and practise different religions as derived from one common source, as we know and relish different fruits of the same tree, we shall reach a common language with a common script whilst we shall retain provincial languages for provincial use."

A correspondent says a great deal is being written against me in the Urdu Press in regard to my attitude towards Urdu. They even go so far as to suggest that though I speak about Hindu-Muslim unity, I am the most communally-minded of all the Hindus.

I have no desire to defend myself against the suggestion referred to by my correspondent. My life must be my credentials on my attitude regarding the Hindu-Muslim question.

But the Hindi-Urdu question is an evergreen. Though I have expressed my views often enough on this question, they will bear repetition. I shall simply enunciate my belief without advancing any argument in support

I believe that

1. Hindi, Hindustani and Urdu are words denoting the same language spoken in the North by Hindus and Mussalmans, and written in either Devanagari or Persian script,

2. Hindi was the name for this language used both by Hindus and Mussalmans before the word Urdu came to be used,

3. The word Hindustani also came to be used later (the date unknown to me) to denote the same speech;

4. Both Hindus and Mussalmans should try to speak

the language as understood by the vast mass of the people in the North;

5. At the same time, many Hindus and many Mussalmans will persist in using Sanskrit words and Persian or Arabic words respectively and exclusively. This we shall have to bear so long as mutual distrust and aloofness continue. Those Hindus who care to know a certain class of Mussalman thought will study Urdu written in Persian script; and, similarly, those Mussalmans who care to know a certain class of Hindu thought will study Hindi written in Devanagari script;

6. Ultimately, when our hearts have become one and we all are proud of India as our country, rather than our provinces, and shall know and practise different religions as derived from one common source, as we know and relish different fruits of the same tree, we shall reach a common language with a common script whilst we shall retain provincial languages for provincial use;

7. The attempt to force one script or one form of Hindi on any province or district or people is detrimental to the best interests of the country;

8. The common language question should be viewed apart from the religious differences;

9. Roman script cannot and should not be the common script of India. The rivalry can only be between Persian and Devanagari. Apart from its intrinsic merit, the latter should be the common script for all India because most of the provincial scripts have their origin in Devanagari, and it is for them by far the easiest to learn. At the same time no attempt whatsoever should be made to foist it upon Mussalmans, and for that matter on those others who do not know it.

10. I served the cause of Urdu, if it may be distinguished from Hindi, when at Indore the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, at my instance, accepted the definition given in *Clause I*, and when at Nagpur at my instance the Bhatiya Sahitya Parishad accepted the definition and called the common language of inter-provincial intercourse Hindi or

Hindustani, thus giving fullest scope to both Mussalmans and Hindus to identify themselves with the effort to enrich the common language and to interpret the best provincial thought in that language.

## A WELCOME MOVE

"The joint statement over the Hindi-Urdu controversy leads one to hope that the controversy will now end, and those who are interested in the evolution of an inter-provincial speech will be able to discuss the question on its merits and discover a plan of joint action."

The joint statement, issued by Maulvi Abdul Haq Sahab and Shri Rajendra Prasad over the Hindi-Urdu controversy, leads one to hope that the controversy will now end, and those who are interested in the evolution of an inter-provincial speech will be able to discuss the question on its merits and discover a plan of joint action. Here is the statement :

"We had an opportunity, on the occasion of the meeting of the Bihar Urdu Committee at Patna on 28th August, 1937, to discuss the problem of the Hindustani language with each other and with some other friends. We were anxious to remove the misunderstandings which have been unfortunately created in connection with the Urdu-Hindi-Hindustani controversy. We are glad to be able to say that as a result of our discussions ranging over various aspects of this problem, we found ourselves in substantial agreement about various points raised. We are agreed that Hindustani should be the common language of India and should be written in both the Urdu and Nagari characters, which should be recognized for all official and educational purposes. By 'Hindustani' we mean the largest common factor of the language spoken in Northern India, and we believe that common usage should be the criterion for the selection and inclusion of words in its vocabulary. We are further of opinion that the fullest opportunities for development should be vouchsafed both to Urdu and Hindi and literary languages. We suggest that an attempt should be made to compile, through the co-operation of Urdu and Hindi scholars, a basic vocabulary of Hindustani words.

"In order to devise practical measures for the compilation of such a vocabulary, as well as for settling various outstanding problems like the selection of technical terms, we suggest that

a small representative committee, consisting of influential advocates of Urdu and Hindi who believe in the desirability of bringing the two languages nearer, and of promoting the development of the Hindustani language and thereby creating good-will amongst the speakers of the two languages, should be convened at an early date "

Let us hope that the authois of the statement will take prompt steps to have the basic vocabulary of Hindustani words acceptable to all parties, and that the small committee they have in view will be set up forthwith for this work and for 'settling various outstanding problems.' I would put emphasis on the smallness of the committee, if promptness is to be ensured.

## HINDUSTANI, HINDI AND URDU

"I know that there are some who dream that there shall be only Urdu or only Hindi. I think it will always remain a dream, and it is an unholy dream. Islam has its own peculiar culture, so has Hinduism its own. India of the future will be a perfect and happy blend of both. When that blessed day comes, their common speech will be Hindustani."

It is a great pity that bitter controversy has taken place and still continues regarding the Hindi-Urdu question. So far as the Congress is concerned, Hindustani is its recognized official language designed as an all-India language for inter-provincial contact. It is not to supplant but to supplement the provincial languages. The recent resolution of the Working Committee should set all doubt at rest. If the Congressmen, who have to do all-India work, will only take the trouble of learning Hindustani in both the scripts, we shall have taken many strides in the direction of our common language goal. The real competition is not between Hindi and Urdu, but between Hindustani and English. It is a tough fight. I am certainly watching it with grave concern.

Hindi-Urdu controversy has no bottom. Hindustani of the Congress conception has yet to be crystallized into shape. It will not be so long as Congress proceedings are not conducted exclusively in Hindustani. The Congress will have to prescribe the dictionaries for use by Congressmen and a department will have to supply new words outside the dictionaries. It is a great work, it is worth doing, if we are really to have a living, growing all-India speech. The department will have to determine which of the existing literature shall be considered as Hindustani, books, magazines, weeklies, dailies, whether written in Urdu script or Devanagari. It is serious

work needing a vast amount of plodding, if it is to achieve success.

For the purpose of crystallizing Hindustani, Hindi and Urdu may be regarded as feeders. A Congressman must, therefore, wish well to both and keep in touch with both in so far as he can.

This Hindustani will have many synonyms to supply the varied requirements of a growing nation rich in provincial languages. Hindustani spoken to Bengali or Southern audiences will naturally have a large stock of words of Sanskrit origin. The same speech delivered in the Punjab will have a large admixture of words of Arabic or Persian origin. Similar will be the case with audiences composed predominantly of Muslims who cannot understand many words of Sanskrit origin. All-India speakers will have, therefore, to command a Hindustani vocabulary which will enable them to feel at home with audiences drawn from all parts of India. Pandit Malaviya's name comes uppermost in this connection. I have known him handle Hindi-speaking and Urdu-speaking audiences with equal ease. I have never found him in want of the correct word. The same is true of Babu Bhagwandas who uses synonymous words in the same speech, and he sees to it that it does not lose in grace. Among the Muslims, at the time of writing, I can think of only Maulana Mahomed Ali whose vocabulary was varied enough to suit both audiences. His knowledge of Gujarati acquired in Baroda service stood him in good stead.

Independently of the Congress, Hindi and Urdu will continue to flourish. Hindi will be mostly confined to Hindus and Urdu to Muslims. As a matter of fact, comparatively speaking, there are very few Muslims who know Hindi well enough to be called scholars, though I expect, in Hindi-speaking parts, to Muslims born there, Hindi is the mother-tongue. There are thousands of Hindus whose mother-tongue is Urdu, and there are hundreds who can be aptly described as Urdu scholars. Pan-



dit Motilali was one such. Dr. Tej Bahadur Sapru is another. Illustrations can be easily multiplied. There is, therefore, no reason for any quarrel or unhealthy competition between the two sisters. Healthy competition there always must be.

From all accounts I have received, it seems that, under the able guidance of Maulvi Saheb Abdul Haq, the Osmania University is rendering great service to the cause of Urdu. The University has a big Urdu lexicon, scientific treatises have been and are being prepared in Urdu. And as the teaching is being honestly imparted through Urdu in that University, it must grow. And if, owing to unreasoning prejudice to-day, all Hindi-speaking Hindus do not profit by the literature that is growing there, it is their fault. But the prejudice has to die. For, the present disunion between the communities is, like all diseases, only temporary. For good or for ill, the two communities are wedded to India, they are neighbours, sons of the soil. They are destined to die here as they are born here. Nature will force them to live in peace, if they do not come together voluntarily.

And as with the Hindus, so with the Muslims. It is the latter's loss, if they will not take advantage of the fruits of the humbler labours of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and the Nagri Pracharini Sabha. It is a pity they have not taken note with pride and pleasure of the big (for the Sammelan) step taken by it in defining Hindi as the language spoken in the North by Hindus and Mussalmans and written in Urdu or Devanagari script. Thus, so far as the definition is concerned, it answers the Congress definition of Hindustani.

I know that there are some who dream that there shall be only Urdu or only Hindi. I think it will always remain a dream, and it is an unholy dream. Islam has its own peculiar culture, so has Hinduism its own. India of the future will be a perfect and happy blend of both. When that blessed day comes, their common speech will be Hindustani. But Urdu will still flourish with a pre-

dominance of Arabic and Persian words, and Hindi will still flourish with its abundant Sanskrit vocabulary. The language of Tulsidas and Surdas cannot die, even as the language in which Shibli wrote cannot die. But the best of both will be quite at home with Hindustani speech.

## ROMAN SCRIPT v. DEVANAGARI

"The introduction of the Roman script is a super-imposition which can never become popular. And all super-impositions will be swept out of existence when the true mass awakening comes, as it is coming, much sooner than any one of us can expect from known causes."

I understand that some of the tribes in Assam are being taught to read and write through the Roman script instead of Devanagari. I have already expressed my opinion that the only script that is ever likely to be universal in India is Devanagari, either reformed or as it is. Urdu or Persian will go hand in hand, unless Muslims of their own free will acknowledge the superiority of Devanagari from a purely scientific and national stand-point. But this is irrelevant to the present problem. The Roman cannot go hand in hand with the other two scripts. Protagonists of the Roman script would displace both. But sentiment and science alike are against the Roman script. Its sole merit is its convenience for printing and typing purposes. But that is nothing compared to the strain its learning would put upon millions. It can be of no help to the millions who have to read their own literature, either in their own provincial scripts or in Devanagari. Devanagari is easier for the millions of Hindus and even Muslims to learn, because the provincial scripts are mostly derived from Devanagari. I have included Muslims advisedly. The mother-tongue of Bengali Muslims, for instance, is Bengali, as is Tamil of Tamil Muslims. The present movement for the propagation of Urdu will, as it should, result in Muslims all over India learning Urdu in addition to their mother-tongue. They must, in any case, know Arabic for the purpose of learning the Holy Quran. But the millions, whether Hindus or Muslims,

will never need the Roman script except when they wish to learn English. Similarly, Hindus who want to read their scriptures in the original have to and do learn the Devanagari script. The movement for universalizing the Devanagari script has thus a sound basis. The introduction of the Roman script is a super-imposition which can never become popular. And all super-impositions will be swept out of existence when the true mass awakening comes, as it is coming, much sooner than any one of us can expect from known causes. Yet the awakening of millions does take time. It cannot be manufactured. It comes or seems to come mysteriously. National workers can merely hasten the process by anticipating the mass mind.

## ONE SCRIPT FOR DAUGHTERS OF SANSKRIT

"If the educated people of the land were to put their heads together and decide upon one script, its universal adoption should be an easy thing"

The question of having one script for the Indian languages, which are daughters of Sanskrit by birth or adoption, has been before the public for a number of years. Yet, in these days of aggressive provincialism, perhaps, any plea for one script will be regarded as an impertinence. But the literacy campaigns raging all over the country should compel a hearing for the advocates of one script. I have been one such for years. I remember having even adopted, in South Africa, Devanagari script for my Indian correspondence with Gujaratis in select cases. Inter-provincial intercourse will be much facilitated by such adoption, and the learning of the various provincial languages will be made infinitely easier than it is to-day. If the educated people of the land were to put their heads together and decide upon one script, its universal adoption should be an easy thing. To the millions, who are illiterate, it is a matter of indifference what script is prescribed to them. If the happy consummation comes to pass, there will be only two scripts in India—Devanagari and Urdu—and every nationalist will deem it his duty to master the two scripts. I am a lover of all Indian languages. I have tried, too, to learn as many scripts as possible. And if only I had the time, even at the age of seventy I have energy enough to learn more Indian languages. That would be a recreation for me. But in spite of all my love for the languages, I must confess that I have not learnt all the scripts. But if the sister languages were written in one script, I should pick up

a workable knowledge of the principal languages of the provinces in very little time. And Devanagari has nothing to be ashamed of in point of symmetry or beauty. I hope that those who are engaged in the literacy campaigns will give a passing thought to my suggestion. If they will adopt Devanagari script, they will save for the future generations tons of labour and time and earn their blessings.

## ROMAN SCRIPT ?

"To teach the Roman script in the place of Hindi and Urdu would be like putting the cart before the horse.....The learning of the two scripts is the best and the easiest way of at least solving the national language riddle."

*Q.* Why may not the illiterate masses be taught the Roman script ? This would eliminate the existing controversy between Urdu and Hindi.

*A.* To teach the Roman script in the place of Hindi and Urdu would be like putting the cart before the horse. Our children have first to learn both Hindi and Urdu scripts. Difficult questions cannot be solved by ignoring them or suggesting apparently easy substitutes. So long as hearts are divided, the Roman script will not cement them. It would be an additional burden. The learning of the two scripts is the best and the easiest way of at least solving the national language riddle. It opens Hindi and Urdu thought to both Hindu and Muslim boys and girls, who will be the men and women of the future generation. The Roman script will be learnt at its proper time, *i.e.*, when our boys and girls are taught the English language, as some undoubtedly will be.

## HINDUSTANI

“A language that borrows unstintingly from the others, without harming its special characteristic, will be enriched, even as the English language has become enriched by free borrowings”

“(a) The proceedings of the Congress, the A. I. C. C. and the Working Committee shall ordinarily be conducted in Hindustani. The English language or any Provincial language may be used, if the speaker is unable to speak in Hindustani or whenever permitted by the President

(b) The proceedings of the Provincial Congress Committee shall ordinarily be conducted in the language of the Province concerned. Hindustani may also be used”

—Article 25 of the Congress Constitution

The Congress has not carried out this resolution to any appreciable extent. It is a sad reflection. The fault is Congressmen's. They will not take the trouble of learning Hindustani. Their effort for learning language is evidently exhausted with the performance of the impossible task of acquiring a knowledge of the English language equal to a learned Englishman's. The result is tragic. It has meant impoverishment of the provincial languages and displacement of the all-India language, described by the Congress as Hindustani. It has also meant a break between the millions and the English-educated few, who happen to be the natural leaders, for the simple reason that they are the only educated class. There is no education worth the name apart from the schools established by the Government. The Congress has to perform the Herculean task of displacing the English language with Hindustani. With the passing of the resolution, it should have created a bureau for fulfilling



the purpose as it might do even now. But if it does not, individual Congressmen and those who are interested in evolving an all-India language should do so.

But what is Hindustani? There is no such language apart from Urdu and Hindi. Urdu has sometimes been called Hindustani. Did the Congress mean Urdu in the article quoted? Did it exclude the more extensively known Hindi? Such a meaning would be absurd. It evidently meant, and could only mean, a scientific blend of Hindi and Urdu. There is no such written blend extant. But it is the common speech of the unlettered millions of Hindus and Muslims living in Northern India. Not being written, it is imperfect, and the written language has taken two different turns tending to widen the difference by each running away from the other. Therefore, the word Hindustani means Hindi and Urdu. Therefore also, Hindi can call itself Hindustani, if it does not exclude Urdu but tries to assimilate Urdu, as much as is scientifically possible without damaging the natural structure and music of the original. Urdu can do likewise. There is no separate Hindustani body attempting to blend the two streams which to-day threaten to run away from each other.

The noble task can be performed by the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and Anjuman-e-Taraqqi-e-Urdu. I have been connected with the former since 1917, when I was invited to preside at its session of that year. I acquainted the audience with my views on the all-India medium. When I presided again at its session in 1935, I was able to persuade the Sammelan to define Hindi as the language spoken by Hindus and Muslims of the North of India, and written either in Devanagari or Persian script. The natural consequence should have been for the members of the Sammelan to expand their knowledge of Hindi, living up to the definition and producing literature that could be read by both Hindus and Muslims. This should have meant the members learning the Persian script. They seem to have denied themselves this proud privi-

lege. But better late than never. Will they bestir themselves now? They need not wait for the Anjuman to respond. It will be a great thing, if the Anjuman does. Each Association can, if it will work in harmony with the other. But I have suggested unitary action independent of the other party. That Association which will adopt my plan will enrich the language it stands for, and will ultimately be responsible for producing a blend which will serve the whole nation.

It is unfortunate that the Hindi-Urdu question has assumed a communal shape. It is possible for either party to undo the mischief by recognizing the other and incorporating the acceptable part in a generous spirit. A language that borrows unstintingly from the others, without harming its special characteristic, will be enriched, even as the English language has become enriched by free borrowings.

## HINDI + URDU = HINDUSTANI

"A language becomes what its speakers and writers make it. English had no merit apart from what Englishmen made it. In other words, a language is a human creation and takes the colour of its creators."

The following letter was written on the 29th ult. and sent to me by its writer by registered post. It was received at Sevagram on the 31st ult. :

"I was very much impressed by your Convocation Address at the Benares University. Specially, your remarks about making Hindustani the medium of instruction in our educational institutions were very apt on the occasion. But do you really believe that there exists in our country any such language as Hindustani ? As a matter of fact, there is no such language, and I am afraid that at Benares you advocated the cause of Hindi and not of Hindustani, and that is the way with all the Congressmen. I wonder why you openly don't say what you really mean. Say, you want Hindi. Why call it Hindustani, or, still worse, Hindi-Hindustani, by which name you wanted to call it some years back and which nobody ever used ?

"Mahatmajī, you say you have no antipathy towards Urdu, still you openly called it the language of Mussalmans, which is written in the Quranic script. You even said that the Mussalmans may take care of it, if they so please. And on the other hand, you several times presided over the annual sessions of Hindi Sabhas and advocated the cause of Hindi and collected lakhs of rupees for it. Have you ever presided over any meeting held for the propagation of Urdu, or would you agree to preside over one now, and have you ever collected a pie for the advancement of Urdu ?

"I have heard Congressmen saying *ad nauseum*, that the Muslim writers should avoid Persian words and Hindu writers should avoid Sanskrit words, and the resultant language will be Hindustani.

"Mahatmajī, you are yourself a very good writer. You must know that practised writers who have developed a style will

never be able to avoid Persian or Sanskrit words, if they are part of the language in which they are writing and of which these writers are regarded stylists, so this advice of yours is absolutely impracticable

"But there is a way out. Make both Urdu and Hindi compulsory at least in one province, say U P., up to the High School standard. By this means, the province in which both the languages are compulsorily taught will have one, common language within, say, about fifty years. The language which naturally belongs to us will remain with us, and the other one, which we are artificially thrusting upon ourselves, will drop out from our lives. It is obvious that when we shall learn both the languages, we shall perforce make that one the vehicle of our thoughts which is more developed, more beautiful, more attractive, more concise, and more expressive. Apart from making the path of vernacularization smooth and easy, this proposal will help a great deal in bridging the wide gulf between the social life of Hindus and Mussalmans. We shall be able to know and sympathize with each other's ideals and beliefs through each other's literature. It is just possible that a new language may evolve out of the mixture of both Hindi and Urdu, then, it may be called Hindustani. It will be a natural language when it comes out of the knowledge of both.

"Mahatmaji, if you sincerely wish that our country should have one common language, I am sure that you will accept this proposal and will recommend it to the country. But I am sure you will do no such thing. Because you are all along advocating the cause of Hindi, and are doing your best to thrust it upon the country. And you must also be knowing that, if both Hindi and Urdu are made compulsory, Urdu will push Hindi out of the field, because Urdu is more chaste, more civilized, more expressive, and more beautiful than Hindi. But my proposal gives equal chances to both the languages. If you believe that Hindi is the natural language of the country, you may confidently hope that it will push off Urdu. There is no use taking shelter under the excuse that you have no power to make both the languages compulsory, as you wrote to me last year. If you only care to recommend the proposal to the country, it will have its effect".

The writer has signed the letter, but as it is marked personal, I refrain from giving his name. In any case, the name does not matter. What the writer says is, I know, the belief held by many Muslims. My repudiation has not undone the mischief.

But my article,<sup>1</sup> which was written on the 23rd ult. and has appeared in *Harijan* of the 1st inst., should soothe the writer so far as I am concerned.

I entirely agree with my correspondent that all who want one all-India speech should to-day learn both the forms—Hindi and Urdu. Those who do, will ultimately give us a common language. That form which is more popular and more understood by the masses, whether Hindu or Muslim, will surely be the all-India speech. But if my proposal finds general acceptance, the language question will cease to be a political issue or a bone of contention.

I do not subscribe to the correspondent's statement that Urdu is "more developed, more beautiful, more attractive, more concise, and more expressive." No language is intrinsically all that the correspondent says. A language becomes what its speakers and writers make it. English had no merit apart from what Englishmen made it. In other words, a language is a human creation and takes the colour of its creators. Every language is capable of infinite expansion. Modern Bengali is what Bankim and Rabindranath have made it. If, therefore, it is true that Urdu is more everything than Hindi, it is because its creators are abler than those of Hindi. I can give no opinion, for I have not studied either as a linguist. I know just enough of both for my public work.

But is Urdu a language distinct from Hindi as, say, Bengali is from Marathi? Is not Urdu a direct descendant of Hindi, written in the Persian character, with a tendency to borrow new words from Persian and Arabic rather than Sanskrit? If there was no estrangement between the two communities, such a phenomenon would have been welcomed. And when the animosities have died out, as they will one day, our descendants will laugh at our quarrels and will be proud of the common Hindustani speech, which will be a mixture of words in-

<sup>1</sup> *Hindustani*, p. 49.

differently borrowed from many languages according to the tastes and equipment of its multitude of writers and speakers.

Let me correct one mis-impression of my correspondent. He seems to think that Hindustani will finally displace all the provincial languages. That is neither my dream, nor of those who have been thinking of an all-India speech. Their dream is that Hindustani should displace English, which has almost become a common medium of communication between the educated classes, resulting in a gulf being created between them and the masses. The tragedy can be prevented only if the common speech, spoken by the largest number of India's inhabitants, is adopted as the inter-provincial speech. The fight, therefore, is not between Hindi and Urdu, but between the two on the one hand and English on the other. The result is a foregone conclusion, in spite of the heavy handicap that the sisters are labouring under, not to speak of the temporary mutual quarrel.

My correspondent quarrels with my connection with the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. I am proud of my connection with that body. It has a record of which it has no reason to be ashamed. The name Hindi was common to both the communities. Both have written in Hindi and promoted its growth. Evidently, my correspondent is ignorant of what my connection with that body has meant. It was under my instigation that it wisely, and shall I say patriotically and generously, adopted the definition of Hindi to cover Urdu. He asks whether I ever joined an Urdu Anjuman. I have never been seriously asked to join any. If I was, I would have made a stipulation with my inviters similar to the one I made with those who induced me to preside at the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. I would have asked the Urdu-speaking inviters to let me ask the audience to define Urdu so as to include Hindi speech written in Devanagari script. No such luck came my way.

But now, as I have already hinted in my article of

the 1st inst. already referred to, I would like to form an Association advocating the learning of both forms of speech and both the scripts by its members, and carrying on propaganda to that end in the hope finally of a natural fusion of the two becoming a common inter-provincial speech, called Hindustani. Then, the equation would be not Hindustani = Hindi + Urdu, but Hindustani = Hindi = Urdu.

## ROMAN SCRIPT

"The Roman script has come to stay in India. But it cannot take the place of the Indian scripts"

*Q* You are prejudiced against the Roman script because you are prejudiced against the English. Otherwise you would unhesitatingly advocate it in the place of Devanagari and Persian

*A* You are wrong. I am prejudiced against neither. But I am against anything or anybody usurping a place not belonging to it or him. The Roman script has come to stay in India. But it cannot take the place of the Indian scripts. If I had my way, there would be only the Devanagari script for all the provincial languages, and Devanagari and Persian for the all-India speech. The Arabic script, from which the Persian is derived, is a necessity for Muslims as Sanskrit is for Hindus. Roman has been suggested as a compromise, and not for its merits. It has none except that it is almost universal in the West. But it must not displace either Devanagari, which is the parent of most provincial languages and is the most perfect of all the known scripts, or Persian, because it is written by millions of Hindus and Muslims in the North. So far as the scripts are keeping them apart, Hindus and Muslims will not come together by adopting a neutral and imperfect script. But they will, both take the trouble, for the love of one another, to learn both scripts. The Roman script has its own great and unique place. It need not aspire after greater.



## TEN QUESTIONS RE: THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE

"If India is a nation, it must have a national language. English will appropriately remain the international language with the Roman script. But the latter can never be the script of the national language."

1. *Q.* The Persian script did not originate in India. It came during the Moghul period just as the Roman script has with the advent of the British. But you do not advocate the Roman script for the national language. Why, then, the Persian?

*A.* If the Roman script had made a home for itself in India in the same way as the Persian, I would agree with you. But the knowledge of the former is confined to a mere handful of English-knowing persons, while crores of Hindus and Muslims are conversant with the latter. You should try to find out the exact number of persons knowing the Roman and Persian scripts respectively.

2. *Q.* If you advocate the learning of Urdu for the sake of Hindu-Muslim unity, then please remember that a large number of Mussalmans in India do not know Urdu. They are conversant only with their own provincial languages. These people would far more easily understand a national language comprising of words familiar to the provincial languages. The Northern India languages are all derived from Sanskrit and, therefore, resemble each other a good deal. Sanskrit words have even crept to a large extent into the Southern languages. Then, why advocate for these people the learning of an unfamiliar Urdu tongue full of Arabic and Persian words?

*A.* There is force in your argument. But I would like you to delve a little deeper into the question. I admit that in asking people to learn the Persian script, I have at the back of my mind a contribution to Hindu-Muslim unity. There has been a long-standing conflict

between Hindi and Urdu tongues as between the two scripts. To-day it has assumed a virulent form. In 1935, in Indore, the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, while defining Hindi, gave a definite place to the Persian script. In 1925, the Congress gave the national language the name of Hindustani. Both scripts were made permissible. Thus Hindi plus Urdu was recognized as the national language. The question of Hindu-Muslim unity was definitely in the forefront in all these decisions. I have not raised this issue to-day. I have only given it a concrete form. It is a logical outcome of events. If we want to develop the national language to the fullest extent, it behoves us to give the two scripts an equal status. In the end, whichever is appreciated more by the people will be the more widespread.

The provincial languages are closely allied to Sanskrit, and it is true that lacs of Muslims are conversant only with their provincial languages, and that Hindi and the Devanagari script will, therefore, be easier for them to learn than Urdu and the Persian characters. My scheme will not interfere with this. In fact, the people will benefit more than ever by learning the Persian script. Your trouble arises because you look upon this as a burden. Whether it is a gain or a burden depends on the outlook of the learner. He who is filled with a love of country will never consider such learning a burden. There will be no compulsion by my scheme. Only those who consider it a gain, will learn the Persian script or the Devanagari, as the case may be.

3. Q A very large proportion of persons in India know the Devanagari script. Surely Punjabis, Sindhis and the Frontier folk can easily learn it, too.

A. The reply to this is really embodied in the preceding answer. Frontier people and others will have to learn the Devanagari script.

4. Q A national language is really more for speech than literary purposes. Its script is, therefore, not so essential or is,

at any rate, of secondary importance. Moreover, is it not easier to learn the national language through one's mother-tongue? And where would be the harm in so doing?

A. You are right. It is easier to learn the national language through one's mother-tongue. As far as I know, this is being done in Southern India though, perhaps, not systematically. Unlike you, I do not look upon the learning of two scripts as a burden. It is not so hard as you fear. I can never be opposed to the learning of the national language through the mother-tongue. Given the keenness to learn it, all systems will be employed.

Q. If it is not possible to make real contacts with the non-Hindi-knowing provinces until some of us have learnt the national language, why not limit the acquiring of this knowledge to workers only? Why make it obligatory for the whole of India?

A. The question of every one learning Hindustani does not arise. Indeed, every one will never do so. The necessity is for those who have to travel and those who want to serve. The latter's ability for service will be greatly increased by a knowledge of both languages and scripts. If you agree, your opposition and suspicion should subside.

Q. To-day the national language is written in both scripts. Whoever wants to learn can choose the one he prefers. Why the insistence on both?

A. In spite of my so-called insistence, only those will learn it who find real gain in so doing. In my eyes he who knows only one of the languages and one script will be half-equipped. If he desires a full certificate from me, he must be conversant with both. I am sure you will have no objection to the desirability of there being many such persons in the country. And unless this number goes on increasing, there will never be a proper blending of Hindi and Urdu. The Congress ideal of Hindustani will never be fulfilled. That Hindus and Mussalmans in the Hindi-knowing provinces should have common speech is

a consummation devoutly to be wished Many of us cling to this hope, and some day it will certainly come to pass.

7. *Q* Will it not be a terrible burden and a futile endeavour for people of the non-Hindi-speaking provinces to learn the national language through both scripts at the same time? To learn first one and then the other would surely be simple

*A* The answer to this will best come from experience He who does not know either script will not learn both at the same time He will master one before commencing on the other So far as the vocabulary is concerned, the words used in the text-books in the early stages will, more or less, be the same I look upon my scheme as a most important and useful experiment If it is properly worked, it will be found to have energized the nation and made a big contribution towards giving practical shape to the Congress resolution I hope lacs of patriotic men and women will take to it.

8. *Q* Certain changes must inevitably take place in any language, as for example, the ingress of foreign words which become part of the language and cannot be evicted But Devanagari has been the traditional script all through the ages During the period of the Moghul dynasty, the Persian script came in But Gujarati, Marathi, etc., while assimilating Persian, Arabic and English words, have not abandoned the script Why should the Devanagari script, then, not be maintained?

*A* There is no question of giving up anything that is ours by tradition. It is a question of adding to or improving what already exists If I know Sanskrit, what harm if I learn Arabic too, or *vice versa*? The result will probably be an enrichment of my knowledge of either language And my contacts with the Arabs or Hindus, as the case may be, will increase Surely, there can be no opposition to the acquiring of right knowledge in any sphere.

9. *Q* From the point of view of easy mastery over the pronunciation of the national language, is not the Devanagari script the best? The Persian script is surely defective for the purpose

*A.* You are right, but your opposition to the Persian script has no place here. Devanagari is not to be displaced. It is a question of adding to the existing knowledge.

10. *Q.* Where is the need for a national language? Will not the mother-tongue and an international language suffice? And, then, why not the Roman script for both?

*A.* Your question surprises me. English, no doubt, is the international language. But can it ever be our national language? The latter must be the common property of millions of our people. How can they sustain the burden of learning the English tongue? Hindustani is the natural national language, for it is already understood by 21 crores. The remainder of the population can also easily understand it. But English may be said to be mother-tongue of a mere handful—say, a lac at the most. If India is a nation, it must have a national language. English will appropriately remain the international language with the Roman script. But the latter can never be the script of the national language.

## APPENDIX

### THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD 'HINDI'

Babu Purushottamdas Tandon, who is the soul of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, recently wrote a long letter to Dr Ashraf on the Hindi-Urdu controversy. The following from his learned letter will be of great interest to those who are following the Hindi-Urdu controversy:

"Personally I prefer the name 'Hindi' because its associations are old and pleasing, and it stands for a synthesis of Hindu and Muslim cultures. 'Hindi' from 'Hind'—the name of our country—has always seemed to me to be an easily understood term. This covers several forms and dialects of that language. Urdu is only a particular form of it. The word 'Hindi' was, for the first time, used by Khusroo. Some writers think that the word 'Hindi' was, for the first time, used by Khusroo for this language. And a galaxy of Muslim writers after Khusroo have used this word not only for the old indigenous form of the language, but for the Persianized form of it. Baqar Agha of Ellore (Deccan), who was born in 1157 Hijri, gave the name 'Diwan-i-Hindi' to the collections of his poems, written in a language which would generally be called Urdu to-day. The well-known poet Mir of Delhi used the expression 'Hindi' for the language which he employed for his poems. Hindi, like Hind, derived from 'Sindh' does not belong to any community or religion. The association which the word has behind it—of great literary achievements of Muslims as well as Hindus—is, to my mind, a common national asset. Khusroo, Kabir, Malik Mahomed Jaisi, Rahim Khan Khankhana, Anis, Raskhan—Muslims who wrote in the old indigenous forms—are surely entitled to as much respect as Ghalib or Zaugh or Atash. The present-day tendency amongst Muslims to keep away from Kabir and Jaisi and Rahim is fundamentally due to the same reason which keeps them away from the Congress. A true patriot will look upon these great Muslim writers, and upon great Hindu writers like Tulsidas and Surdas, with genuine love and pride. It is cultural development of this kind that I look forward to. And I am clear that this will come about with common social and political endeavour."

—Mahadev Desai

## HINDI-URDU CONTROVERSY

In my last week's letter, I cited Babu Purushottamdas Tandon's learned remarks on the Hindi-Urdu controversy. Here is what Vincent Smith wrote when there was no such controversy:

"The various necessities which forced the Mahomedans and Hindus to meet each other involved the evolution of a common language. Some Mahomedans learned Hindi and even wrote in it, as Malik Mahomed of Jais did in the time of Humayun. Multitudes of Hindus must have acquired some knowledge of Persian. A convenient compromise between the two languages resulted in the formation of Urdu, the camp language, the name being derived from the Turki word *Urd*, 'camp,' the original form of the English word 'horde.' Urdu is a Persianized form of Western Hindi, as spoken especially in the neighbourhood of Delhi. Its grammar and structure continue to be Hindi in the main, while the words are largely Persian. The language of Persia, after the Mahomedan conquests, became filled with Arabic words which, consequently, are numerous in Urdu. No definite date can be assigned to the beginnings of Urdu, which shades off into Hindi by insensible gradation: but it is certain that during the Sultanate period the evolution of a language, intelligible to both the conquerors and the conquered, went on unceasingly. Urdu gradually became the vernacular of Indian Mahomedans and developed a literature. Many Hindi words occur in the writings of Amir or Mir Khustoo, who died in 1325 and is sometimes reckoned as a writer of Urdu."

Even Muslim authorities are agreed that Hindi with its grammar was there when the Muslims came, and Urdu came into being with the object of bringing the rulers into intimate contact with the ruled. The new-comers adopted the grammar, also adopted part of the vocabulary, but brought another language into being by the admixture of a large number of Persian and Arabic words. Prof. Amaranatha Jha, in an article in *The Leader*, thus distinguishes the character of the two languages that thus came into being:

"Urdu became the language used by the townsmen of Delhi, Agra, Meerut, Lucknow, but even the Muslims who spent their

time in these cities lapsed invariably in their dialect or *patois* when they went even for a few days to their villages. I trust I do no injustice to Urdu when I state that it had little to do with, it did not concern itself, it sought no contact with the masses dwelling in the villages. Hindi is a language of the people, its literature never lost contact with them. It belongs to the villages, and it lacks, therefore, the polish, the grace, the urbanity of the town. But that is precisely why it has remained full of vitality and not become effete and emaciated and mechanized."

He, then, enters a strong plea for retaining and developing both the languages and deprecates the tendency to decry one at the expense of the other, and a move to make a province like U. P. or the N. W. Frontier monolingual.

"All this," says Prof. Amaranatha Jha, "makes one frankly suspicious of the *bonafides* of the protagonists of a common language, and that language Hindustani. One suspects a motive other than cultural or educational or literary. How many of those, who complain against Hindi, have troubled even to know the Nagari script? How many of those, who desire to create 'Hindustani,' know even one Hindi classic? It is good to be frank. Look, in any given year, at the list of Hindu students appearing in Urdu at University or Board examinations. And look also at the number of Hindus offering Persian. Contrast next the number of Muslims offering Hindi, and—unless there is a miracle—the number of Muslims offering Sanskrit. Or, go to any hostel of Hindu students, there will always be some Urdu magazine or newspaper in the reading room. Go to a Muslim hostel, you will not find a Hindi magazine there even by mistake."

Eloquent of this desire on the part of Hindi-knowing people to assimilate the best in Urdu is Pandit Ramnaresh Tripathi's admirable selection of Urdu poetry, published in Devanagari script in his *Kavita Kaumudi*<sup>1</sup> Series. An equally commendable attempt in the same direction is made by Sjt. Ramchandra Sharma who has published in Devanagari an Urdu-Hindi Dictionary,<sup>2</sup> in

<sup>1</sup> "Urdu Kavita Kaumudi"—To be had of Hindi Mandir, Prayag, Allahabad.

<sup>2</sup> To be had of Hindi-Granth-Ratnakar Karayalaya, Hirabagh, Bombay 4



which Persian and Arabic words of common occurrence in the best Urdu literature have been given with their meanings in Hindi.

I should like to know of similar attempts—if there are any—made by Urdu-knowing people to facilitate the assimilation of all that is best in Hindi—*Mahadev Desai*.

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